

Cheap Meat: Flap Food Nations in the Pacific Islands, by Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010. ISBN cloth, 978-0-520-26092-4; paper, 978-0-520-26093-1; x + 213 pages, illustrations, photographs, maps, notes, references, index. Cloth, US\$55.00; paper, US\$22.00.

This book is an ethnographic study of the high social, political, and health costs of cheap meat—sheep bellies, usually called lamb flaps, which “move from First World pastures and pens in New Zealand and Australia, where white people rarely eat them, to Third World pots and plates in the Pacific Islands, where brown people frequently eat them—and in large amounts” (1). Some aspects of this project grew out of authors Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington’s studies of globalization as epitomized by Ramu Sugar Limited and its corporate parent, earlier published as *Yali’s Question: Sugar, Culture, and History* (University of Chicago Press, 2004). On a similar scale, *Cheap Meat* entailed extensive observation in a number of sites, and interviews with producers, traders, consumers, and government officials. The focus in this book is on another facet of the globalization of foods.

Rather than slicing immediately into the flap over flaps, the authors take a measured approach in their first chapters, discussing the history of human consumption of meat and the social and religious values attached to it. Here, as elsewhere, they draw on their anthropological studies for apt examples, including the Kaluli cosmology that posits a mirror universe in

which “humans in the Kaluli world appear as wild pigs to those in the other world, and vice versa” (17), and they quote Marvin Harris’s work on the historical desirability of fatty meat because of the energy it provided for hunting. Obesity rates in some Pacific Island nations are discussed in relation to the assertion that the trade in flaps “is not a simple matter of supply and demand,” but is instead, according to Gewertz and Errington, “a complex and political matter filled with connotations about comparability and worth” (23). The first chapter concludes with an examination of flaps and other foods as “totems,” potent objects that “serve to define groups and identities—both in and of themselves and in contrast to those of others” (25).

Next, the authors examine meat production and trade, first aided by interviews with sheep farmers, a meat producers’ union leader, and a legendary meat broker. The emphasis on working conditions, historical trends in meat sales, and the strategies of meat sellers in New Zealand (and, to some extent, Australia) helps set the stage for chapter 3’s examination of historical and contemporary practices of meat traders in their dealings with Pacific Island nations, both in the office and in the field. Errington and Gewertz compare these business people to anthropologists, as they “take pride in their ability to orient themselves in different sociocultural situations and to engage with a range of differently located people. And, like anthropologists, they enjoy telling vivid stories about the adventures they have had and the people they have met” (54). One trader admitted that

“he likes telling stories about how tough it is to do business in Papua New Guinea because it scares off prospective competitors” (67).

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the history and health effects of the sale of flaps in Papua New Guinea. Aided by the researchers’ long-term connections to that country, this section of the book resonates with personal stories of Islanders, and with a sense of free access to information at many levels of the problem. Here, interviews with purchasers and sellers, aided by the fieldwork of assistants and the perspectives of a physician, help ground this study. “This trade,” the authors conclude, “is no simple manifestation of the free-market truth that meat never goes uneaten. Even if the price is right, the traffic in cheap, fatty meat is likely to be politically charged” (114).

Although attempts to curtail the trade of flaps in Papua New Guinea have met with little success, the picture is somewhat different in Fiji and Tonga. In Fiji, a ban on the sale of flaps has been in effect since 2000, but even this apparent success is fraught with complications: some of the Fijians interviewed raised questions about the nature of a free market as well as concerns over individual freedoms. The situation in Tonga is described more briefly, as there is no ban in that country but there have been some recent initiatives on the part of the Tongan royal family to promote healthy lifestyles. This will be a heavy task: in places like Tonga and Sāmoa, meat is no longer an accompaniment to meals of carbohydrates and vegetables, but a central component (144).

In their final chapter, “One Super-size Does Not Fit All,” the authors

briefly refer to the works of Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation* [2001]), Morgan Spurlock (the documentary film *Super Size Me* [2004]), and Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* [2006]), to more broadly discuss food issues worldwide. This chapter is a helpful review of the problems and also raises important questions of independence, choice, health, and politics. After all, the authors assert, their job as anthropologists is to “contextualize all these claims and counterclaims” (161), and, for such a complex issue, the contextualization is a complicated and saturated matter indeed.

This book could be a successful supplement for anthropology or Pacific studies courses and for courses on food and globalization. For readers curious about food choices, globalization, and some of the effects of free trade movements, *Cheap Meat* will provide a dense meal of ethnographic data, interesting human stories, and provocative questions about inequality, status-seeking, and lifestyle-related diseases.

LARRY M LAKE
Messiah College

* * *

Traditional Micronesian Societies: Adaptation, Integration, and Political Organization, by Glenn Petersen. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8248-3248-3, x + 278 pages, maps, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$42.00.

A welcome addition to the small library of comparative work on Micronesia, this book takes full